



2009 State of the State Address

January 27, 2009

Thank you Speaker Richard, President Pro-tem Shields, Leaders LeVota and Callahan, Justices of the Missouri Supreme Court, Lieutenant Governor Kinder, statewide officials and Members of the General Assembly. I also welcome the many thousands of Missourians who are tuning in on TV, on the radio, or online.

It also gives me great pleasure to introduce Missouri's First Lady, Georganne Nixon, and our two sons, Jeremiah and Will.

We come here tonight in the spirit of public service, and public service often requires sacrifice. I'd like to offer a special welcome to someone who truly represents sacrifice and dedication to service - Staff Sergeant William Boyd.

A proud Member of the Missouri National Guard from Centertown, Sergeant Boyd served our nation in Iraq. In February 2005, Sergeant Boyd was riding in a convoy when his vehicle hit a hole left by a roadside bomb. The vehicle overturned several times, and broke two bones in the Sergeant's left leg.

Sergeant Boyd underwent two surgeries in Iraq and a third in Germany, where they inserted a metal rod into his leg. Upon arrival back in Missouri where he would undergo extensive physical therapy, his doctors told him he would not be able to rejoin his unit in Iraq.

He asked the doctors if he could return to Iraq if he made a full recovery. They said no, but Sergeant Boyd resolved to change their minds. By June, he was running again, and the doctors gave their approval for him to return to duty. So Sergeant Boyd headed back to Iraq and served with his unit through the end of their deployment.

In the spirit of recognizing those who sacrifice to serve, and to give thanks to the many brave Missourians who are in harm's way this very evening, please join me in welcoming Sergeant Boyd. Sergeant, we are honored to be in your presence.

Fifteen days ago, we stood together on the steps of the Capitol to mark a "New Day for Missouri." We declared it a new day for every Missouri family that holds out hope for a better future.

A new day for the 219,000 Missourians out of work, the highest unemployment rate in 25 years. And for the 729,000 who have no health coverage. And the 42,000 families who have had their homes foreclosed last year.

And on those Capitol steps two weeks ago, we also declared it a new day for bipartisanship here in Jefferson City. These are historically difficult times, and they will require historic levels of cooperation.

Some doubted a new tone in Jefferson City was possible. So far, I am pleased to report that together, we're proving the nay-sayers wrong. Sure, it's been just two weeks. But they've been two productive weeks. We're rolling up our sleeves. We're getting to work, and we're doing it together.

This new tone is possible, I believe, because we start with a set of shared principles. Shared by me, the members of the General Assembly and most importantly - shared by the people of Missouri.

First. We believe in the value of a hard day's work. But too many Missourians are unemployed - or fear they may soon become unemployed. We must help small businesses grow. And we must invest in technology, science, and innovation to create the next-generation jobs we need to compete in the 21st-Century. We must create new jobs and we must do it now.

Second. We believe in fiscal responsibility and balanced budgets. We face a significant budget shortfall, but we will bring our budget into balance by making difficult decisions, and by making government more efficient. Not by putting the burden on the backs of the weakest among us. And, not by raising taxes on Missouri families or businesses.

Third. Education is the key to our future. From pre-school to college, we must prepare every child to compete. We must support our teachers. And we must make the dream of a college education a reality for more Missouri families.

Fourth. A healthier workforce is a more productive workforce. And a strong health care system will help lure new businesses to our state. We must expand access to affordable health care, particularly for the 150,000 Missouri children who are uninsured today.

And fifth, the people of Missouri must be given reason to trust their elected officials and have faith in their work. That means a more open, transparent and accountable government.

These five principles don't represent Democratic values or Republican values. They're Missouri values. They're our values. And they've guided me in laying out next year's budget.

Tonight, as I put forward my plan to address many of our critical challenges, I do so in the spirit of cooperation and bipartisanship. We were all elected by the people of Missouri, and we all share the common goal of serving the people of Missouri.

If one of you has a better way to fix our health care system, I'm ready to listen. If someone else has a cost-effective way for the state to create new jobs, let's hear it. Many of the best ideas come from outside the halls of government. And the challenges we face are too steep to worry about who gets credit for the solution.

Times are tough. We all know that.

The national economic meltdown is creating serious challenges for Missouri families. Jobs are being lost. Homes are being foreclosed. Retirements are being delayed. And everyone is concerned about what the future will bring.

Jobs are the lifeblood of our economy. When jobs are lost and businesses shut down, communities suffer and people start losing hope. To start turning this economy around, we must take immediate action on our first shared principle and join together to get Missourians back to work.

Several weeks ago, I laid out the initial pieces of our Show Me Jobs plan. A series of steps that we can take to create jobs and stimulate economic growth. It's a fiscally responsible plan, and I've been encouraged by the bi-partisan support that it has received thus far.

And because immediate action was needed, one of my first acts as Governor was to sign three executive orders to help spur job creation.

Many of our new jobs will come from small businesses. So we proposed a new low-interest loan program for Missouri small businesses - to make it easier for them to expand and grow, or in some cases, easier to just keep their doors open.

From DeSoto to Chillicothe. From Cape Girardeau to St. Joe. Barber shops. Coffee shops. Hardware stores. The places where we've shopped since we were kids. Small businesses give our communities character and they make our Main Streets vibrant. We must renew our efforts to help small businesses thrive and prosper.

We must ensure that opportunity and job growth takes place in all of our communities. That's why we must support our women and minority-owned businesses so that they can continue to grow and create jobs.

It's not just small businesses that are facing tough times in this economy. The American auto industry is in peril, and Missouri has felt the pain as much as anyone. In the past two years, thousands of Missouri autoworkers and auto industry employees have lost their jobs. I've met with many of these men and women. They're the most skilled autoworkers in the nation. They take a great deal of pride in their craft, and they're anxious to get back to work.

Giving up on Missouri's auto industry is not an option.

That's why I have ordered the creation of an Automotive Jobs Task Force to make sure that we're in the best possible position to revitalize the automobile industry in Missouri. In the years to come, America will produce a new generation of automobiles - electric cars, trucks powered by fuel cells. We must ensure that those new cars and trucks are built right here in Missouri.

Every idea must be considered as we seek to create the jobs our state so needs. We are discussing some new ideas tonight. Programs that don't work will be ended. But when we know something works, we will increase our investment.

The Quality Jobs Act has incentivized business owners to create thousands of high-paying jobs that offer health care. Good middle-class jobs. The Quality Jobs Act has worked. We must not only continue this program, we must expand it.

Programs like the Quality Jobs Act are one important tool in our toolbox for creating jobs. But our strongest asset is and always will be our people. I've said it many times: Missouri is home to the best workers, the best craftsmen in the world. But the set of skills that meant guaranteed employment in the past, now offers no such certainty in this new economy. To seize the economy of the future, we must ensure that our workers have the skills and training for the jobs of tomorrow.

We're joined tonight by Patrick Davis, a young man from Ferguson. Patrick had worked for 14 years at the Ford Plant in Hazelwood, but like many of his brothers and sisters, he was laid off when the plant closed in 2006. But Patrick dusted himself off and took action to learn a new skill. He enrolled at a worker retraining program at Florissant Valley Community College, and learned to convert the craft he knows - building cars -- into a craft that landed him a next-generation job building F18s, one of the best fighter jets the world has ever seen.

Please join me in welcoming Patrick tonight.

We must help more Missourians look down the road and stay ahead of the curve, just like Patrick has. Identifying next-

generation jobs and making sure our workers are ready to compete. Jobs in technology, innovation and lifesaving research.

The "green jobs" that will create new energy solutions. Jobs building wind turbines, hydroelectric facilities, solar panels, next generation batteries, more efficient window and doors. The list goes on and on. And so do the opportunities.

Right now, we have far too many jobs in health care that we can't fill right here in Missouri because we can't find people with the right skills. We need nurses, pharmacy workers and rural health care workers. Filling those positions is critical to both our economy and our health care system. That's why I've called for the creation and funding of the Caring for Missourians program - an initiative that will coordinate efforts between our two and four-year institutions to train our next generation of health care workers.

We have hardworking Missourians ready to fill these skilled jobs - they just need a little help getting there.

So my budget invests in people.

We'll build a workforce ready to tackle the challenges of this new economy. I believe Missouri's economic future depends on the strength of Missouri's people. When a company wants to build a new plant or open a new office, they'll want to come to Missouri, not just because they get the best deal, but because they'll get the best workers.

That's why, despite the budget problems we face, I have called for an increase in funding for job development and training programs of 38 percent.

And as we invest in Missouri's people, no one should be left behind. Under my proposed budget, I have called for increased funding to help Missourians with developmental disabilities earn a living and contribute to society.

On that point, I'd like to introduce you to a gentleman named Glenn Cromley. Glenn is now 61 years old, and was diagnosed with a cognitive disability when he was a child. Like many parents with children who have disabilities, his parents worried about whether Glenn could lead a productive and happy life. When Missouri launched the Sheltered Workshop program in 1966, Glenn's parents signed him up. The workshop provides an opportunity for Glenn to work and contribute each day, preparing first aid kits for local distributors.

Please join me in welcoming Glenn, his mother Sue, and his workshop supervisor, Roger Garlich.

Every Missourian is unique and valuable, and every Missourian must have the opportunity to realize the value of a hard-day's work. Now, some have called for the Sheltered Workshop Program to be eliminated. Let me tell you - that's not going to happen. Not while I serve as your Governor.

Quite the contrary, in order to ensure that more Missourians like Glenn have the opportunity to live independent and successful lives, my budget proposes increasing funding for our Sheltered Workshop program.

Now we all know we cannot move our economy forward without moving Missouri agriculture forward. We must ensure that Missouri's family farmers and agri-businesses are ready to compete in this new economy. Branding Missouri products and increasing opportunities to export them. Making sure that every dairy farmer, row cropper and livestock seller has access to world markets, and has the technology to connect to those markets.

We know that within Missouri's own agricultural capacity lies a possible solution to our nation's energy crisis. Missouri must remain on the leading edge of efforts to develop the renewable energy sources of our future. That's why my budget provides full funding for ethanol and bio-fuels.

And in 2009, there is no reason why some of our rural areas still don't have access to high-speed Internet. The information super-highway must be accessible to all Missouri families.

Protecting and creating jobs must be our top priority. We must take quick action. Tonight, I repeat my request: Send me an emergency jobs plan before the March break. I'll sign a comprehensive, fiscally sound package. And together, we'll start getting Missouri back to work.

Now, the economic challenges we face are significant. Just as Missouri families are readjusting their budgets to deal with economic realities, the state must do the same. Everyone is forced to make difficult choices.

But as I said earlier, we balance our budgets here in Missouri. Fiscal responsibility is a principle that we share.

So here is something we can all agree on. We will balance our budget, this year, next year, and the year after that. We won't place the burden on the weakest among us. We won't abandon our priorities or shared principles. And we won't raise taxes.

We face an immediate shortfall in FY09 of more than a quarter of a billion dollars. I've already begun to implement the tough decisions necessary to make our government leaner and more efficient. We'll balance our books without cutting important public services.

But even larger economic problems loom ahead for the next fiscal year.

To tackle the budget challenges we face in FY10, we are embarking on an unprecedented initiative to make government leaner and more efficient.

To bring about this needed reduction, my budget eliminates or cuts 50 programs. Many bureaucratic positions will be consolidated or eliminated altogether. Hundreds of additional positions that are currently unoccupied will not be filled.

In total, my FY10 budget proposes the elimination of more than 1,300 positions. We will cut nearly \$200 million from overhead by eliminating these positions and cutting bureaucracy. After just two weeks in office, we are proposing the smallest state bureaucracy that Missouri has seen in a decade. The reduction I am proposing today represents the largest single reduction in the state's bureaucracy in modern history.

And because Missourians will get a government that's smarter and more efficient, most families will not see changes in the services they count on.

Make no mistake, I value our state workers, and these cuts will not be easy.

We must always remember that public service is among the most honorable lines of work. The folks who protect our families and keep our parks clean. The brave men and women who help our communities overcome natural disasters. As their chief executive, I stand with our state employees today and always.

We will take action to make government smaller, but that alone will not be enough. We must also make government more efficient. Now more than ever, we must stretch every dollar Missouri taxpayers send us.

In the coming weeks I will appoint a Taxpayer Protection Commission to implement widespread performance reviews. Top-to-bottom reviews of every agency and program to identify what's working and what's not working. What could be run more efficiently and where we can consolidate.

For example, the Taxpayer Protection Commission's work will include a strict and thorough review of every tax credit program.

Let me be crystal clear on this point. Tax credits are for creating jobs and strengthening communities, not for padding the pockets of the wealthiest among us. In addition, I have ordered the review of all long-term government contracts. We must get our arms around this budget shortfall before we continue committing our state to future spending.

And in the General Assembly, Republicans and Democrats must work together to send me a budget that reflects our need to be more fiscally responsible.

Now, we have every reason to believe that a federal recovery package will soon be passed by Congress, and money will be sent to the states to help create economic growth. We've been working closely with the Obama Administration and our Congressional delegation on this matter. And I have established an Economic Stimulus Coordination Council to ensure that Missouri is prepared to wisely invest the assistance that comes from Washington in a way that is efficient, fiscally responsible and consistent with our shared principles.

While the budget I submit tonight includes significant cuts, we will not put the burden on the backs of our young students.

We all share the belief that education is the key to ensuring economic strength long into the future. Missouri's pre-K-through-12 education system is the foundation of all efforts to prepare our young people to compete in the 21st Century. And only a strong education system will ensure that all Missouri children can achieve their full potential.

So even in these difficult economic times, we must fully fund the education foundation formula. That is not negotiable.

Under the budget I submit to you, Missouri classrooms will receive more than 3 billion dollars in state aid.

In addition, I propose a larger investment in early childhood education. We must continue to support funding for career education, the Parents as Teachers program and the Small Schools program. And I have called for increased funding for First Steps, a critical program that helps so many Missouri children get off on the right foot.

We must give our public school teachers the tools they need to educate our children. And make sure that every child has a productive learning environment. That's why I've called for an increase in funding for the "Safe Schools" program, which promotes alternative schools for disruptive students.

When a kid consistently acts up in class, we want them to go to an alternative place where they can learn - not to the street corner.

Every child in Missouri deserves the opportunity to succeed. And that means a quality education for all children - no matter what zip code that child lives in, or what that child's parents do for a living. Education must be the great equalizer.

But we know that in the 21st Century, a pre-K-through-12 education is only the beginning. For many, a college degree can be critical to competing in a modern economy.

That degree is out of reach for too many Missouri families. Unaffordable. And the cost of college forces a difficult decision for too many Missourians.

It's a decision much like the one that Marcus and Rachelle Brent from St. Louis recently faced. Marcus and Rachelle had dreamed of sending their daughter Keirstin to college - and worked hard all their lives to make it happen. But just a few weeks ago, they both unexpectedly lost their jobs, and it turned their world upside down. They were left with a difficult decision: Should they take money out of their 401Ks in order to help Keirstin go to college? Or should they ask their daughter to give up her dreams of a college degree?

Marcus and Rachelle decided that their daughter's education comes first. And today Keirstin is a freshman at Harris Stowe State University in St. Louis.

We welcome Keirstin here tonight, and we salute Marcus and Rachelle's dedication to her future.

Families across the state are postponing retirements, taking out second mortgages, doing whatever they can to make college a reality for their children. It shouldn't have to be this way.

Even with her parents' help, Keirstin will still graduate with thousands of dollars of debt. She'll have a hard time buying that new house or new car. Instead of pumping money back into our economy, she'll be paying off the degree that's hanging on her wall.

Tuition has skyrocketed in part because the state has slashed its support for colleges and universities. In the past, when the state has faced challenging economic times, higher education has often been the first target for cuts. Not this time.

Under my proposed budget, Missouri's state colleges and universities will receive the same level of support next year that they currently receive.

And in exchange for the state's continued level of support, the presidents of the state's public colleges and universities have agreed not to increase tuition on Missouri students.

Students in other states will see their tuition continue to skyrocket this year. But not here.

Under my proposed budget, not one Missouri student at a public Missouri college, university or community college will see their tuition go up next year. And that is a major victory for Missouri families.

But for many middle-class Missourians, even the current cost of tuition at our public four-year colleges and universities is unaffordable.

To highlight this point, I'd like to tell you about a young lady I met a few months ago. Her name is Jennifer Long. Jennifer grew up in Pleasant Hill but she currently attends Pittsburg State University in Kansas. I asked her why she - or any Missourian - would choose to go to college in Kansas. She told me that she wanted to stay here in Missouri, but she qualified for in-state tuition in Kansas because she lived in a nearby county. And, the schools in Kansas are more

affordable.

Jennifer had gone to community college in Missouri on an A+ scholarship - but then had to leave the state in order to afford her four-year degree. That shouldn't happen.

That's why my budget includes funds for my plan called the Missouri Promise. It builds upon our current A+ Schools Program, which allows students at eligible high schools to get their two-year degrees at community colleges tuition free.

The Missouri Promise allows those students who take advantage of A+ scholarships to continue at a Missouri public college or university - and complete their four-year degree debt free.

So now, as long as they keep a B average and give back to their community, students like Jennifer Long will have a pathway to earn a four-year degree and graduate debt free, right here in Missouri.

Please join me in welcoming Jennifer, who joins us tonight. Thank you for coming. We wish you all the best at Pittsburg State. But when you graduate, we need you to come back home and help our economy here in Missouri.

In addition to the Missouri Promise, we'll continue funding other important scholarship programs - like the Missouri Teacher Education Program, Bright Flight, the Missouri Minority Teaching Program, and the Urban Flight and Rural Needs Program.

And we will continue to honor our heroes in the Missouri National Guard as they return home from overseas by fully funding tuition assistance programs. Despite these tough economic times, the State of Missouri will keep its end of the bargain for those who fought for our freedom and safety.

Now, our state's health care system has been broken for some time. And lately, matters have only been getting worse. More than 729,000 Missourians are uninsured, including 150,000 children. Families who have insurance are struggling to afford it. Hospitals are struggling to keep up with the lines at Emergency Rooms.

Nobody should feel good about the state of our health care system. Nobody should feel good that we have 150,000 uninsured children in Missouri. Thousands of parents in our state have to worry about letting their children play outside with their friends after school - because one slip and fall could mean bankruptcy for the family.

In Missouri, there are 100,000 children among our uninsured who are right now eligible for health coverage under Medicaid or the State Children's Health Insurance Program, but are not signed up. That's unacceptable.

We need to identify these families, and put together a coordinated effort to recruit them. We'll eliminate premiums for some kids and create a level premium for the rest. We're going to tear down the roadblocks that are preventing eligible families from registering their children for S-CHIP. And we'll seek to form public-private partnerships to assist families that can't afford S-CHIP premiums.

Tomorrow, I'll propose a supplemental budget recommendation so that we can immediately begin the process of getting these children the health care they deserve.

Not only is it unacceptable that so many of our neighbors live without access to affordable health care, this broken system directly impacts our state's economy. New companies aren't coming to Missouri and employers are not adding workers

because the cost of health care is just too high. We cannot get this economy moving until we get the cost of health insurance under control. And we cannot get the cost of health insurance under control until we reduce the number of Missourians who don't have it.

Reducing the number of uninsured Missourians is not just the right thing to do for our neighbors. It is the smart thing to do for our economy.

So, we must begin the process of reducing the number of uninsured. It's a massive problem, and in these difficult times, we won't fix it overnight. But we must make progress, and start heading in the right direction once again.

There are many options on the table, and I am open to all good ideas that achieve our common goal - providing more Missouri families access to health coverage that they can afford at a cost that the state can afford.

That's why, in my budget, I've begun the process. Tonight I am offering a plan to expand health coverage to 62,000 more Missourians - that's 35,000 working adults and 27,000 children. We'll pay for much of the cost of this expansion by drawing down additional federal matching dollars.

But let's be clear. While this is the logical first step towards expanding health coverage, it won't be the last step. We must continue to work together to further expand coverage and further drive down costs for Missouri families.

I look forward to working with the legislature to find common ground on this critical issue for our state. And make no mistake, we must take action to address the health care crisis in Missouri this year.

Working together, we can accomplish a lot to bring about the change our state needs. But at a very fundamental level, we must also regain and retain the trust of the people of Missouri.

We can all agree that our government must be more open, more transparent, more responsive and more accountable.

The people of Missouri have had reason to be skeptical of their government in recent years. Legislators doubling as political consultants. Special access for the special interests. A campaign finance system that allows unlimited contributions to flow into candidates' coffers.

That all must stop.

Two weeks ago, I officially put an end to the antiquated system that allowed Governors to give away license fee offices to their political allies. It was a system reminiscent of the political machines and the smoke-filled rooms of the past. Those days should be long behind us.

For as long as I'm your Governor, license fee offices will go to the people or organizations that will run them most effectively and provide the best service to Missourians. I'm encouraged by the bi-partisan support the new system has received, and I hope the General Assembly will send me a bill to make this change permanent.

Elections should be competitions of ideas, not competitions to recruit the largest number of wealthy donors. The people of Missouri have gone to the polls and spoken on this issue: They want strict contribution limits. I agree with them. There is no reason that special interest groups from across the country should be pouring millions of dollars into local elections here in Missouri. That's why I believe we must pass a real campaign finance reform bill during this session.

It's difficult to overstate the seriousness of the challenges we face.

In the coming weeks, we will make the tough decisions needed to tackle our economic challenges. Those decisions won't be easy, and they won't come without sacrifice. Even in these historically tough times, we must continue moving forward. We must all work together to make our state a better place.

The economic climate may have changed in recent months, but the principles we share have not.

We are all in this together.

We all see a future where every Missourian who works hard has a place to work. And where parents can sleep at night knowing that their children will have the medical care they need. A state where every young person has a chance to realize their dreams, and where we know that our government is always on our side.

The solutions to our problems are within reach. And the only thing that can stop us is the same thing that always stops progress: a failure to listen, a failure to compromise, or a failure to walk a day in someone else's shoes.

By working together, we will tear down old barriers and tackle the challenges we face.


United by the principles we share today, Missouri will come back stronger tomorrow.

It is a new day for the Show-Me State, and we're excited by what the future will bring.


Thank you and God bless the great state of Missouri.

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